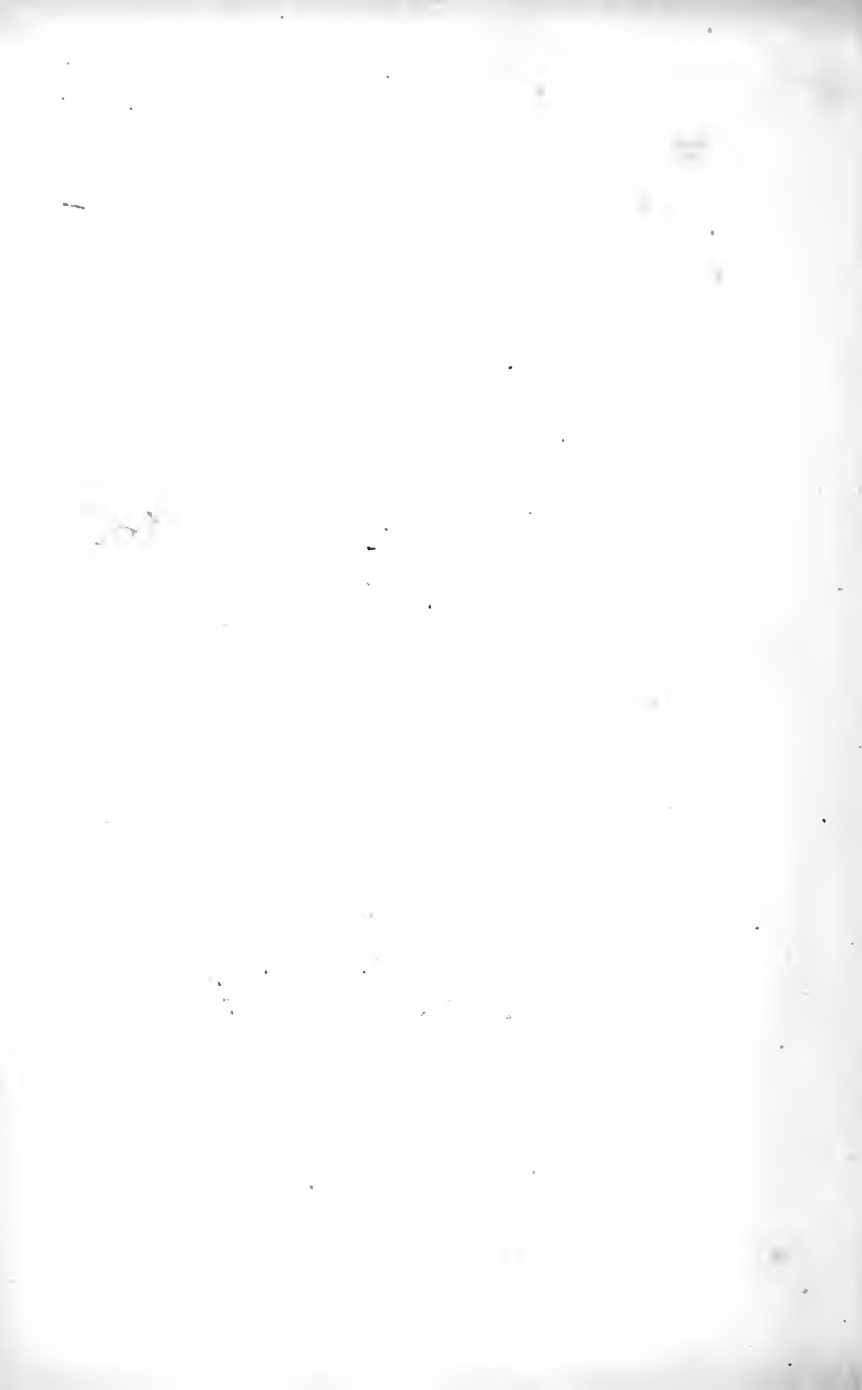


INTERLUDES
AND
UNDERTONES

CHARLES MACKAY



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INTERLUDES AND UNDERTONES.

Ballantyne Press

BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

INTERLUDES AND UNDERTONES

OR

MUSIC AT TWILIGHT

BY

CHARLES MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "VOICES FROM THE CROWD," "EGERIA," "A MAN'S HEART,"
"LEGENDS OF THE ISLES," ETC. ETC. ETC.

"Quisquis amat, nullâ est conditione senex"

PONTANUS

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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PREFACE.

THOUGH prefaces are nearly obsolete, from having degenerated into form without spirit, and into attempts to say something where nothing is required, I nevertheless think it necessary to affix a preface to this little volume by way of explanation. It is a collection of the last leaves that have grown on a literary tree which has been blossoming for forty years. If the tree were once gay with the flowers of Spring, it is possible that amid the yellowing foliage of its Autumn there may yet be found some flowers of fancy as well as some fruits of riper experience that may suit the tastes of the newer generation that has arisen since the author's earlier time. Laughter and tears, like flowers and fruit, are the produce of one stem ; and if, when we survey society, we either laugh or weep, should the laughter dwindle to a smile or the tear refuse to flow because a sigh may be sufficient, we may be sure that both the smile and the sigh have the same origin in human sympathy. It is in this spirit that the author offers the following verses to the old friends who may remember his earlier efforts, and to the

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new friends whom it is possible he may acquire. Even in an age when Science, with its marvellous discoveries and no less marvellous applications, invades the monopoly once enjoyed by imagination, there is still room for poetry if it be worthy of the name and have a meaning clearly expressed in appropriate language, and can make good its claim to be something better than mere verse. To the class of readers who admire without understanding, and who unconsciously allow themselves to think that whatever is beyond the reach of their intellect must be magnificent, the author makes no appeal. He considers that it is the duty, and that it should be the pleasure of every writer, to express himself clearly, and if he cannot do so, that he should throw aside his useless pen as an admission that he has mistaken his vocation. Lyrical and all other poetry should avoid misty verbiage, confused thought, and pithless metaphysical subtleties, and should, as Milton says, be "simple, sensuous, and passionate," and, above all things, intelligible to the heart and understanding of the uneducated as well as of the refined. To the rule of Milton the author has endeavoured to conform his verse, not without the hope that it might thereby become poetry as distinguished from mere verse, even to the busy and prosaic-minded people of the closing decades of the nineteenth century.



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I.

UNWRITTEN BOOKS.

GLORIOUS are the books
With joy and wisdom fraught,
Unwritten,—not unread
In the library of thought ;

The ripples of the river
That sparkle to the sun,
And whisper to the woodlands,
Rejoicing as they run :—

The foam-crest of the billows
That surge against the shore,
The deep psalm of the forest
When the wild winds rave and roar :—

The crimsoning gold of sunset
Before the west grows dark,
And in the mellow morning
The anthems of the lark :—

The palaces of Cloudland
Illumined by the moon,
In the fulness of her splendour
In the balmy month of June :—

The deep dark blue of midnight
To our poor human eyes,
Revealing while concealing
The wonders of the skies :—

And noblest book of all
To read,—if read we can,
In words of blazing lustre,
The destinies of man,
Marching from good to better
In God's eternal plan !





II.

G O N E !

“ **G**ONE is the freshness of my youthful prime ;
Gone the illusions of a later time ;
Gone is the thought that wealth is worth its cost,
Or aught I hold so good as what I've lost ;
Gone are the beauty and the nameless grace
That once I worshipped in dear Nature's face ;
Gone is the mighty music that of yore
Swept through the woods or rolled upon the shore ;
Gone the desire of glory in men's breath
To waft my name beyond the deeps of Death ;
Gone is the hope that in the darkest Day
Saw bright To-morrow with empurpling ray ;
Gone, gone—all gone, on which my heart was cast ;
Gone, gone for ever, to the awful PAST ;—
All gone—but LOVE ! ”

Oh, coward to repine !
Thou hast all else, if LOVE indeed be thine !





III.

POOR LIZZIE! (An Unromantic Romance.)

YOU fwear I loved you dearly once—
Perhaps! my pretty Lizzie;
But then was then—and now is now:
I'm busy—very busy!

You'd like to have a thousand pounds!
Good girl, your brain is dizzy!
But mine is calm, and knows the world:
I'm busy—very busy!

You'll try your rights! you'll go to law!
Your lawyer's clever! *Is he?*
Well! give the man my best respects,
I'm busy—very busy!





1V.

THE HARP UNSTRUNG.

ONCE to the touch of a gentle hand
It made sweet music in the land,
The tunes leaped out of its quivering strings
And the harmonies fanned them like angel wings,
Till they glowed and glittered like fire-flies bright
Sparkling with melody and light.

But the hand lies cold beneath the sod,
And the beautiful spirit dwells with God,
And the chords are broken and thrill no more
With the music, the life and the love of yore ;
Silent unless when the winds go by,
And wake them to a sob, or sigh !





v.

CLOUDS.

NOBODY looks at the clouds
With a love that equals mine,
I know them in their beauty,
In the Morn or Even shine.
I know them and possess them,
My Castles in the air,
My Palaces, Cathedrals,
And Hanging Gardens fair.
Sometimes I think, star-gazing,
That many a monarch proud,
Has far less joy in his Halls of stone
Than I in my Halls of Cloud.





VI.

GREAT AND SMALL.

THERE is nor great nor small in nature's plan,
Bulk is but fancy in the mind of man ;
A raindrop is as wondrous as a star,¹
Near is not nearest, furthest is not far ;
And suns and planets in the vast serene
Are but as midges in the summer sheen,
Born in their season, and that live and die
Creatures of Time, lost in Eternity.





VII.

FOR EVER !

“ **F**OR ever ! yes, for ever ! ”
Said the soapsud bubbles, glancing
And sparkling and rejoicing
In the funny summer air.

“ For ever ! yes, for ever ! ”
Said the noontide midges, dancing
In the shelter where the breezes
Could not catch them unaware.

“ For ever ! yes, for ever ! ”
Said the poet to his poems ;
“ So bright ye are, and lovely,
Like the gems in History’s hair ! ”

But, alas ! the Evening came,
And the bubbles and the midges
And the poems, all had vanished !
Where, oh where ? oh, tell me where ?





VIII.

A WORM IN THE SUNSHINE.

POOR fellow-mortal ! creeping
Over the dewy grafs,
I fee thee in the funfhine
And spare thee as I pafs,—
I arrogate above thee
No mastery of man,
I have no right to harm thee,
And will not, if I can.

Thou liveft, Fate permitting,
Thy fhort predefigned hour,
What more do mighty monarchs
In plenitude of power ?
They work their good or evil,
They run the race allowed,
Then pafs away, unfeptred,
Into the common crowd !

Perchance fome hungry ftarling,
In eager morning flight,
May feize thee for its breakfast,
Making its Might its Right.

Perchance, at Time appointed,
Ruin, with fiery breath,
May grip me in its clutches,
Less merciful than Death!

Yet, comrade, small and humble,
Until the end arrive,
We share the same sad secret
That shadows all alive.
We *are*;—but why we know not;
And neither thou nor I
Can solve the eternal riddle;—
There's sunshine in the sky!





IX.

FOUNDERED.

HOW many a glorious morning have I seen
 Darken ere noon in fearfullest eclipse!
How many a sea, pellucid and serene,
 Have I known treacherous to deep-laden ships.
Alas! alas! how many a gallant soul—
 Artist, romancer, scholar, bard, divine,
Poor wherries in the wild Atlantic roll—
 Have I seen founder in the pitiless brine!





THE DREADFUL MINUTES.

THE dreadful, dreadful minutes !
 Silent and sure and slow ;
They master and quench and overwhelm
 Alike our joy and woe.
They conquer beauty, youth, and strength,
 And grind in their cruel mill
Glory and Fame and Power and Wealth,
 Alike the good and ill.

The dreadful, dreadful minutes !
 They drip and drift and pass,
And shear the generations
 As a mower shears the grass.
Till nought remains of Cæsar
 Except a floating breath,
A lie on the page of History,
 A drop in the sea of Death !





XI.

HEAVEN AND HELL.

IS Heaven a place, or state of mind ?
Let old experience tell !
Love carries Heaven where'er it goes,
And Hatred carries Hell.





THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES.

IF we can fend a message round the earth,
And conquer Time, as measured by the sun,
Without obstruction from its rolling girth,
Shall we deny to Heaven what man has done ?

Shall we deny that Star may sing with Star
In chant sublime, unheard of mortal ears ?
And with our petty thoughts of near or far
Presume to talk of distance in the spheres ?

Doubt it no more, ye earth-imprisoned souls !
All Heaven is filled with sympathies divine,
And orb with orb rejoices or condoles,
And flash electric music as they shine.





XIII.

MAN OVERBOARD.

THE FIRST MATE.

NOT alone in the storm lurk the danger and the sorrow.
One evening years ago, doing duty on the deck,
I heard a sailor shout, "Man overboard!" and looking
Over the calm Atlantic, saw him floating like a speck!
We could not stop the engines, going thirteen knots an
hour,
Or throw him out a life-buoy, so rapidly we sped;
But I caught, like a thought, his face to Heaven upturn-
ing,
And prayed for his soul as we left him with the dead.

THE PASSENGER.

Not alone in the sea do the men go down in billows—
I have seen such things on land, 'mid the humble and
the proud,—
Men of mark and men of none, and Leviathans of
commerce
Go down in calmest weather, 'mid the deep unpitiful
crowd.

A flutter and a plash, and a short expiring struggle,
As the great big Ship of Life roars and steams and
rushes by :

Man overboard? What matters? The paddles roll for
ever,—

'Tis the hand of Fate hath done it! Let him die!





XIV.

AN ADIEU.

GOOD night, sweet Sorrow,
 Until to-morrow,
And then we shall dwell together again ;
 I've known thee long,
 Like a mournful song,
 Till thou'st grown a part
 Of my innermost heart,
And a nestling bird on my pillow of pain.
 Sweet little Sorrow,
Come back to-morrow,
I've learned to love thee—remain, remain !





xv.

LIVING MEN.

I SEE the true men of to-day—
The great, the brave heroic souls—
Not as they pass me in the way
Amid the common human shoals ;—
But with the eyes of future Time,
Their halos fixed, their wreaths empearl'd,
Sages, and wits, and bards sublime—
The benefactors of the world.





XVI.

EUTHANASIA.

POOR and mean are our thoughts of Death,
The world's a wheel in a rut ;
And men still think as their fathers thought,
With scarcely an "if" or a "but."
To me, kind Death seems a lady fair,
A teeming mother, well wed,
Whose children inherit another world—
The new-born, beautiful dead.
Born with a glory unperceived
By us on the gloomy shore,
Children that sport in their Father's light,
And know their Mother no more !





XVII.

IN THE CENTRE.

WHAT do I care for opinions
That darken the light of my reason,—
Or argue me down with false logic,
Or tell me that truth is untruthful?
I judge for myself and my conscience,
And stand in the Centre of Circles,
Untempted to stray upon tangents,
Serenely contemplating all things,
Above me, around me, beneath me!
And if I go wrong, I go wrong without guile,
And if I go right, I am right for awhile;
Until I discover, as surely I must,
That soul cannot fear for mortality's dust.





XVIII.

TO NELLIE.

A VALENTINE FROM NEW ORLEANS.

I.

BEAUTIFUL day, O beautiful day !
There's not a cloud on the rim of Heaven,
Except to the westward, far away,
Three little islands, rent and riven,
Three little isles of fleecy white
Bathing themselves in the rosy light.
And the wind blows balmy from the south
As it had kissed the summer's mouth,
And told to all, the graceless rover,
How sweet, how gracious was its lover.

II.

Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful day !
Bright as our bonnie English May ;
Yet lacking something—hard to tell—
I know not what—but feel it well,
Present, though ineffable.
Is it that here condemned to roam,
I sigh for the colder skies of home ?

Perhaps; yet I am grateful still
 For the privilege to breathe at will
 This buxom and rejoicing air
 That bathes the bright world everywhere;
 To see the palms and orange growing,
 And Nature all her boons bestowing.

III.

Ah, no! not *all*! 'tis fair to see;
 Yet something fails; what can it be
 That I, not difficult to please
 In the beauty of the grass and trees,
 Have found a void, ye lovely hours,
 In the fair splendour of the bowers?

IV.

Unsatisfied! unsatisfied!
 I miss the white amid the green;
 I miss the flowers—the daisies pied,
 And cowslips peering up between;
 I miss the song of the trilling lark—
 Soaring, soaring, and singing ever,
 From the dawning till the dark,
 The song unborn of an endeavour,
 But gushing from his happy voice
 As freely as from morning sun,
 The light that bids the world rejoice
 In the new gladfomeness begun.

V.

All these I miss this pleasant day;
 All these and something more divine—
 Thy smile, dear Nellie, far away,

Thy hand, sweetheart, to clasp in mine;
The voice oft heard from lips of thine,
That breathes the words 'tis joy to hear
Even in remembrance. Wanting these
I bless the skies so balmy clear,
The health and gladness on the breeze;
But miss my joy beyond the sea,
And pine for England and for thee.





XIX.

BEAUTY AND GRIEF.

THERE'S something beautiful in sadness,
A something sad in all that's fair,
To trace, why this should be, is madness,
And leads the mind we know not where.
Yet when we think on these affinities,
Beauty and grief become divinities.





XX.

A QUESTION AND A REPLY.

THE YOUNG MAN TO THE OLD.

SAY, whither art thou going,
Thy hands upon thy breast,
Thy face toward the sunlight
Fast fading in the west?

THE OLD MAN TO THE YOUNG.

I am going, flowly going,
Undismayed and undistressed,
To the last estate that's left me,
To the last, may be, the best!
To the regions of Oblivion,
To the chambers of the blest,
"Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest!"

THE YOUNG MAN'S REPLY.

God have thee in His keeping!
'Tis His, not our behest!
But is this *all* we come to
After our toil and quest?

Is nothing we aspire to,
O'erburdened and oppressed,
Ever to recompense us—
Nothing but Peace and Rest?





XXI.

MY FELLOW-CREATURES.

YOU love your fellow-creatures? So do I,—
But underneath the wide paternal sky
Are there no fellow-creatures in your ken
That you can love, except your fellow-men?
Are not the grass, the flowers, the trees, the birds,
The faithful beasts, true-hearted without words,
Your fellows also, howsoever small?
He's the best lover who can love them all.





XXII.

OUTSIDE AND IN.

QUIETLY browse the meek-eyed cattle,
Quietly nibble the timid sheep,
And the wind among the beechen branches
Seems as 'twould cradle the rooks to sleep.
The smoke curls blue from the kitchen chimney,
The manor house glints white in the sun ;
Peace dwelleth here, and the evening glory
Of a life—well ending—well begun.

Thou foolish rhymers ! Pass the threshold !
The master sits in his old arm-chair,
And two strong keepers watch beside him,
Lest he should slay himself unaware.
He raves, he whines, he groans, he whimpers ;
His wife and children have fled, forlorn ;
And could he know the doom he suffers,
He'd curse the day that he was born.





XXIII.

THE POET.

“WHO is this?” said the Moon
To the rolling Sea,
“That wanders so gladly, or madly, or fadly,
Looking at thee and me?”

Said the Sea to the Moon,
“’Tis right you should know it,
This wise good man
Is a wit and a poet;
But he earns not, and cannot,
His daily bread,
So he’ll die
By-and-by,
And they’ll raise a big monument
Over his head!”

Said the bonnie round Moon to the beautiful Sea,
“What fools the men of your Earth must be!”





XXIV.

THE ETERNAL PENDULUM.

SWING on, old pendulum of the world,
For ever and for ever,
Keeping the time of suns and stars,
The march that endeth never!
Your monotone speaks joy and grief,
And failure and endeavour;
Swing on, old pendulum, to and fro,
For ever and for ever!

Long as you swing shall earth be glad,
And men be partly good and bad;
Long as you swing shall Wrong come Right,
As sure as Morning follows Night;
The days go wrong—the ages never—
Swing on, old pendulum—swing for ever!





XXV.

YESTERDAY.

WHAT makes the king unhappy?

His queen is young and fair,
His children climb around him
With waving yellow hair.

His realm is broad and peaceful,
He fears no foreign foe;
And health to his veins comes leaping
In all the winds that blow.

What makes the king unhappy?

Alas! a little thing,
That money cannot purchase,
Or fleets and armies bring.

And yesterday he had it,
With yesterday it went,
And yesterday it perished,
With all the king's content.

For this he sits lamenting,
And sighs, "Alack! alack!
I'd give one half my kingdom,
Could YESTERDAY come back!"



XXVI.

WEAPONS.

BOTH swords and guns are strong, no doubt,
And so are tongue and pen,
And so are sheaves of good bank notes,
To sway the souls of men.
But guns and swords, and piles of gold,
Though mighty in their sphere,
Are sometimes feebler than a smile,
And poorer than a tear.





XXVII.

A GREAT WARRIOR.

I AM a warrior, stout and strong,
I've fought the cold world, hard and long,
I've fought it for a crust of bread,
And for a place to lay my head.
I've fought it for my name and pride,
Back to the wall, with both hands tied ;
I've felt its foot upon my brain,
And struggled, and got up again !
And so I will, if so I must,
Until this dust returns to dust.
Meanwhile the battle rages on,
Let me die fighting, and begone !





XXVIII.

DIAMOND SCRATCHES.

FIVE years ago, in this cosy Inn,
We passed a pleasant day,
Four merry friends, who ate and drank,
And were blithe as birds in May.
We scratched our names on the window pane : —
There they stand in the threen,
And prove to me, if to nobody else,
What fools we must have been.

One of them borrowed my cath (a dove
That never returned to the ark) ;
The second was jealous of my fame,
And stabbed it in the dark !
The third made love to a bonnie wee maid
Dearer to me than life,
Wooded her and won her behind my back,
And made her his wretched wife.

And here I sit in the cosy Inn,
While the bright wood-splinters blaze,
And drink my pint of claret alone,
And think of the bygone days,

And wonder which of my three false friends

I hate or despise the most;—

Surely not him who borrowed my cash?

'Tis gone—'tis a bodiless ghost!

Surely not him who stole my wife?

That was not my wife, God wot!

But might have been, to my dire distress,

Had she fallen to my lot!

I think I hate with the deadliest hate

The fellow who flurred my name—

Shaking my hand, eating my bread,

And murdering my Fame!





XXIX.

COMPETITIVE CRAM.

I COULD not tell the cutler's name
Who fold the blade that murdered Cæsar,
Or fix the hour when Egypt's queen
First thought that Antony might please her.
I could not say how many teeth
King Rufus had when Tyrrell shot him ;
Or, after hapless Wolfey's death,
How soon or late King Hal forgot him.
I could not tell how many miles
Within a score rolled Thames or Tiber,
Or count the centuries of a tree
By close inspection of its fibre.
So I was plucked, and lost my chance,
And plodding CRAM passed proudly o'er me.
Who cares for CRAM ? I've Common Sense,
And Health, and all the world before me !





XXX.

BOOKS.

BLESSINGS on books ! that ever show
What ancient wits and fages taught,
And pour in bounteous overflow
The ever living stream of thought !

Blessings on books ! while they are ours,
And souls are reached through ears and eyes,
We're equals of th' immortal powers,
We're partners in the earth and skies !





xxx1.

MIDGES IN THE SUNSHINE.

IF I could see with a midge's eye,
Or think with a midge's brain,
I wonder what I'd say of the world,
With all its joy and pain ?
Would my seven brief hours of mortal life
Seem long as seventy years,
As I danced in the flickering sunshine
Amid my tiny peers ?
Should I feel the flightest hope or care
For the midges yet to be ;
Or think I died before my time,
If I died at half-past three,
Instead of living till set of sun
On the breath of the summer wind ;
Or deem that the world was made for me
And all my little kind ?
Perhaps if I did, I'd know as much
Of Nature's mighty plan,
And what it meant for good or ill,
As that larger midge, a man !



XXXII.

FANCIES.

“WHENCE come your beautiful fancies?
From the earth or the heavens above?”
“From neither!” the poet replied, “they stream
From the eyes of the woman I love!
There are far more thoughts in her sunny glance,
Than stars in the midnight skies!”
“You’re a fool!” said his friend. “Perhaps I am!
What’s the good of being wife?
I would not change this folly of mine,
No, not for an Empire’s prize!”





XXXIII.

PRICES.

BEEF and bacon, bread and beer,
Raiment, lodging, fire,
All things that men most forely need
And painfully desire,
Mount up in price, from day to day,
Higher and ever higher.

Alas, for the honest worker
With nought to sell but brain !
Who wears it out by over-toil
His poor dry bread to gain !

Work doesn't follow the price of beef ;
And if the wretch complain,
Men answer, " Nobody wants your work,
Beggar ! you've lived in vain ! "





XXXIV.

SMALL, BUT GREAT.

THE sun can mirror his glorious face
In the dewdrop on the sod,
And the humblest human heart reflect
The light and love of God.





XXXV.

GIFTS.

YOU say I throw my gifts to the unworthy :
So doth the Lord of Love who rules on high ;
So doth the liberal Sun to all things earthy,
To hill or plain, to palace or to sty.
Who sells his gifts for gratitude expected
Is but a bargaining huckster at the best ;—
The Sun asks nothing for his rays reflected ;
I ask for nothing—prithee let me rest !





XXXVI.

DEFIANT AND SELF-RELIANT.

MY back is to the wall,
And my face is to my foes,
That surge and gather round me
Like waves when winter blows.
The ghosts of bygone errors,
The faults of former years,
That sting my veins like arrows
And pierce my heart like spears.

But let them do their utmost,
For these I can endure,
And meet and overcome them,
By suffering made pure.
Against all other foemen
I'll fight with fiery breath,
And if, all done, I'm vanquished,
Go gloriously to death.

My back is to the wall,
And my face is to my foes,
I've lived a life of combat,
And borne what no one knows.

But in this mortal struggle
I stand—poor speck of dust,
Defiant—self-reliant
To die—if die I must !





XXXVII.

VANITY OF VANITIES.

“What is it to be wise?

’Tis but to know how little can be known.”

POPE.

A POOR, poor fellow, a very good fellow,
Went maundering by the sea,
Gazing at times to the starry heaven,
At times to the wild waves free.
And said to himself, wife-looking,
“I’d know the eternal plan;
I’d solve the riddle of fortune,
The meaning of God and man.”

And a voice came out of the darknefs,
Out, perchance, from his soul—
“Thou fool! wouldst ladle the ocean
Into the rim of a bowl?
Wouldst make thine eye the circle
Of all that the worlds contain,
Or gather the stars in a chalice
No bigger than thy brain?”

Out of the dark came brightness,
And a second voice replied—
“ Forgive me, oh, forgive me,
My arrogance and pride !
Wisdom is born of folly,
And folly from wisdom grows ;
And he is wiser than wisdom
Who knows how little he knows ! ”





XXXVIII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

I SPEND my days among the immortal dead,
For ever young,—for ever fresh and free ;
I walk with Shakſpeare's light upon my head,
Or ſit with Byron by the ſtormy ſea ;
I ſee with Homer's eyes the days of old,
Or trace with Gibbon's lightning-feathered pen
An Empire's fall ; and wonder, as I'm told,
If mightier Britain, lacking mighty men,
Shall ſink like Rome into the depths forlorn
And leave no Empire to her after-born,
Be cauſe her manhood rotted to decay ;
And ſighing, hope, “ Far diſtant be the day ! ”

The frivolous living talk not with my ſoul,
I weary of their ſenſeleſs jeſt and jeer,
And ſtrive to keep within a calm control
My ſcorn and ſorrow for the inſincere ;
And if I fail a while, I ſtrive to dip
My ſpirit in the Ocean of old Time,
My happy Books,—where, ſailing like a ſhip,
I viſit, conquering, every ſhore and clime !

I'm lonely in the crowd ; amid my tomes
I have the choice of rich ancestral homes,
Where I can dwell with an exultant mind
Pleased with myself, at peace with all mankind.





XXXIX.

THE DEVIL AND I.

THE devil? Yes! I have often seen him,
Changeful ever in form and face;
Once in the shape of a lump of money,
Once like a maid in her youthful grace.
Once like a life-long hope accomplished,
Once in the shape of a thought infilled,
Once in the guise of my heart's ambition,
Once like a promise of joy fulfilled!

Never he comes as a roaring lion.

No! He is always calm and bland,
Courteous, witty, and pleasant spoken
As the bravest gentleman in the land.
'Tis a cheating game that we play together;
But he's not so clever as men opine!
I know that his lordship's dice are loaded—
He does not know that I've loaded *MINE*!





XL.

THE TWO SLEEPS.

EACH night we seek a temporary death,
And are unhappy if it fails to come,
And morning dawns with life in every breath,
And the tongue speaks that for a while was dumb ;
And when the longer Death, which none escape,
Conquers our seventy years, or less or more,
Is it not Sleep that takes another shape ?
And shall we not awaken as before ?





XL1.

THE MILESTONES.

SEVENTY milestones on the road,
The road on which we travel,
Sometimes through the bog and mire,
Sometimes o'er the gravel.

Sometimes o'er the velvet grafs,
Or through the forest alleys,
Sometimes o'er the mountain tops,
Or through the pleafant valleys.

Sometimes through the garden walks,
Light of heart and cheery,
Sometimes o'er the jagged ftones
With bleeding feet and weary.

All my milestones lie behind,
Nearly all I reckon,
And I can fee grim Death before
That feems to nod and beckon.

Let him beckon ! let him nod !
My knees are fupple-jointed,
He cannot ftop me if he would
Before the hour appointed.



XLII.

GHOSTS.

GHOSTS often come to my window,
And knock at my chamber door,
They sit by my side at dinner,
Or walk with me on the shore.
I know their villainous faces,
As they giggle, and sneer, and jar ;
They will not be gone, so I'll count them,
And tell them what they are !

Ghosts of ambition buried,
Ghosts of a love grown cold,
Ghosts of a fortune squandered,
Ghosts of a tale that's told,
Ghosts of a traitorous friendship,
And of follies nine times nine !
Come, wizard, come and lay them
In the deep Red Sea of wine ;
Or, if wine be out of fashion,
Bury them in the brine !



XLIII.

THE GREATEST OF LUXURIES.

SAID the great Dives (millionaire),
 “Good Fortune never flies me,
One only luxury in the world
 She churlishly denies me.
I could indulge it if I would,
 While still among the living,
But if I did, ’twould break my heart—
 The luxury of giving!”

“Alas! poor soul!” said Lazarus,
 With scorn in every feature,
“I’d not exchange my lot for yours—
 You miserable creature!”





XLIV.

GOD GIVETH HIS BELOVED SLEEP.

I STRIVE with aching heart and head,
All the long day and half the night,
For paltry recompense of bread,
And win it in the world's despite ;
It gives me life, and little more ;
Yet why complain ? One blessing cheap
Is superadded to my store—
God giveth His beloved sleep.

And am I one of these ? Why not ?
Our pains and pleasures intertwine—
After the fight that must be fought
There comes a truce with peace divine.
'Tis wise to struggle and endure ;
After all sorrow great and deep,
The recompense is sweet and sure—
God giveth His beloved sleep.





XLV.

OWNERSHIP.

I AM the owner of Beauty !
In every curve and line,—
I claim it ; I possess it
By right of a power divine !
I'm not the lord of the vineyard,
But I drink the noble wine ;
I draw no rent from the acres,
But the lovely landscape's mine.
Volumes and pictures and statues,
In rich men's palaces shine ;
I can neither buy nor sell them,
But they're mine in the spirit—*mine !*





XLVI.

OCCULT SYMPATHIES.

THE FIRST IDEA.

IF Nature knew my sorrow,
Would she borrow
My sad song?
Or if she knew my pleasures,
Would her measures
Lilt along?
Not at all! Oh, not at all!
Nature is no man's thrall,
The bird sings in the air,
And knows not of our care.
The wind amid the trees
Makes its own melodies.
What signifies to these our happiness or woe?
Let the hoarse billows roar! Let the wild breezes blow!

THE SECOND IDEA.

Not so, grave moraliser,
Be thou wiser,
And so learn,
That we ourselves to Nature
Give the feature
And the plan.

She pranks her in our guise,
And lives but in our eyes.
If you and I are glad,
The bells ring merry mad ;
If we are grieved at heart,
The skies their gloom impart.
And winds among the trees, and waves upon the shore,
Sound sadly, ever sadly—sadly evermore !





XLVII.

THE PHILOSOPHIC SMOKER.

BY ONE WHO DOES NOT SMOKE.

SOMETIMES the big world vexes me,
Sometimes dull care perplexes me :
Sometimes on the sea of life
Such storms around me cluster,
And roar and rave and bluster,
I seem to sink in the strife.
No matter ! There's always truce
In the heat of the wildest war :
At least I dream or think so,
Smoking my first cigar.

Sometimes when nothing ails me,
Except that the red gold fails me,
I envy the rich in their pride ;
Though their only obvious merit
Is the gold that they inherit
And couldn't earn if they tried ;
But quietly after dinner
I banish such thoughts afar,
What do I care for Fortune
Smoking my second cigar ?

Sometimes, in the heartless city,
I think it a shame and pity
That cash and virtue are one ;
That to swindle for shillings seems awful,
While to plunder for millions is lawful,
If only successfully done.
But why should I mend its morals,
Or call the world to my bar ?
I've dined, and I wish to be quiet—
I'll smoke my last cigar !





XLVIII.

FRIENDS.

IN DEEP WATER.

FAIR-WEATHER friends, that fought me once,
I fail to reach the shore;
Thick darkness shrouds the face of heaven,
And angry tempests roar.
Idle is all your good advice:
I want a rope—a hand—
A heart—a will—a little skill
To draw me to the land.

THE FAIR-WEATHER FRIENDS.

Rope, did you say? we have no rope;
We drove you not to sea;
You've drifted blindly out of depth:
Drift back again, say we!





XLIX.

*THE DEBTOR AND CREDITOR AND THE
FRIEND WHO PAYS.*

THE CREDITOR.

YOU owe me full a thousand pound.

THE DEBTOR.

I owe, but cannot pay.

THE CREDITOR.

Then you must go to prison strong.

THE DEBTOR.

Well, if I must—I may.

THE FRIEND WHO PAYS.

“ Hold off your hand, hard-hearted wretch !

 This man is not for thee !

His age is threescore years and ten,

 And he’s in debt to *me* !

“ He owes *you* money—*me* his life.

 Come, aged friend !” he saith ;

“ Come to my quiet prison-house,
Come to the peace of DEATH.

“ This huckster acts from base revenge,
And I for love divine ! ”
The old man sighed and breathed his last,
“ DEATH ! only friend ! I’m thine ! ”





L.

THE DEMI-SEMI LUNATIC.

SAID Fate to the Fated,
 "Unravel my skein."
Said the Fated to Fate,
 "'Twere eternally vain."
Said Body to Soul,
 "We are mysteries twain."
"Wherein do we differ?"
 Said Pleasure to Pain;
"Are not living and dying
 Mere links in a chain?
And is not the antidote
 Part of the bane?"
Unriddle my riddle,
 O sphinx of the plain!
It weighs on my spirit,
 It addles my brain.





L1.

A BURIAL-PLACE.

BURY me not, bury me not,
Under the greenwood tree ;
Bury me not in the earth at all,
Bury me in the sea.

What do I care for a monument ?
What for a lying scroll ?
What for a record of this or that ?
I am a living soul ?

And if the spirit should haunt
The place where the body lies,
Then mine shall float on the flying wind,
Betwixt the waves and skies.

Spite, nor malice, nor scorn,
Shall defecrate the spot,
And the whirling breeze shall sing the dirge
Of one remembered not.



LII.

THE QUID PRO QUO.

I HEARD you ask in a whisper light,
Who that ugly old woman might be?
Turning your eyes (they are not very bright)
With a leer and a sneer at me.

Good fir! this ugly old woman
Was once a pretty girl;
'Twas about the time your whiskers grew,
And your beard began to curl.

I was the handsomer of the two,
Though sooner laid on the shelf.
Good fir! ere you mock at others,
'Twould be well to look at yourself!

An ugly old woman! you said, fir?
A hideous old man! say I.
Padded, bewigged, without a tooth;
Neither fit to live, nor die!

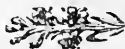


LIII.

BEAUTIFUL OLD AGE.

HOW to be beautiful when old
I can tell you, maiden fair—
Not by lotions, dyes, and pigments,
Not by wafhes for your hair.
While you're young be pure and gentle,
Keep your passions well controlled,
Walk, and work, and do your duty,
You'll be handsome when you're old.

Snow-white locks are fair as golden,
The gray is lovely as the brown,
And age's smile is far more pleasant
Than youthful beauty's scornful frown.
'Tis the soul that shapes the features,
Fires the eye, makes sweet the voice;
Sweet sixteen, be these your maxims,
When you're sixty you'll rejoice.





LIV.

NUT-CRACKING.

WHEN I could crack a nut
 With the molars in my jaws,
With teeth all white and steadfast,
 And innocent of flaws,
I laughed at angry Fortune,
 Made light of coming sorrow,
Was happy all the day,
 And careless of the morrow.

I trusted men and women,
 And women most, maybe!—
Oh, pleasant was that spring-time
 To my teeth and me!
But now, when teeth are shaky,
 And going one by one,
I find, like Israel's monarch,
 Small good beneath the sun.

I cannot crack a nut,
 I cannot find a truth
In man or lovely woman,
 Like those I found in youth.

Put back, O cruel Fortune,
Thy sword into its sheath,
Let me believe in something,
And contradict my teeth !





LV.

PROGRESS.

WE travel faster than we did
 A hundred years ago,
And send by wire and not by post
 Our messages of woe :
Or else the price of stocks and shares
 And wool and calico.
We conquer Time, make light of Space,
 And every passing day
Snatch some new force from Nature's hand,
 And teach it to obey.
But are we happier than our fires,
 Or brave and good as they ?
Speak up, old History ! tell the truth !
 Give us the yea—or nay !





LVI.

*CYNICAL ODE TO AN ULTRA CYNICAL
PUBLIC.*

YOU prefer a buffoon to a scholar,
A harlequin to a teacher,
A jester to a statesman,
An Anonyma flaring on horseback
To a modest and spotless woman—
Brute of a public !

You think that to sneer shows wisdom,
That a gibe outvalues a reason.
That slang, such as thieves delight in,
Is fit for the lips of the gentle,
And rather a grace than a blemish,
Thick-headed public !

You think that if merit's exalted
'Tis excellent sport to decry it,
And trail its good name in the gutter ;
And that cynics, white-gloved and cravatted,
Are the cream and quintessence of all things,
Ass of a public !

You think that success must be merit,
That honour and virtue and courage
Are all very well in their places,
But that money's a thousand times better ;
Detestable, stupid, degraded
Pig of a public !





LVII.

IN A DROP OF WATER.

I KNEW a mighty emperor,
He lived in a drop of water ;
I saw him through a microscope,
A very king of slaughter !
“ I’m monarch of the world ! ” he said,
“ Some love and some abhor me,
But everywhere my will is law,
And myriads fall before me.”

No doubt his “ majesty ” was great,
While ran his little minute,
And might have been for longer time,
And done some mischief in it.
Had I not come and swept him up,
To him, and his, a mystery,
And made an end of his little big world,
And his mighty little history !





LVIII.

SEVEN.

I.

SEVEN fresh acorns on the lea,
 Browned by summer's fiery glow,
Newly fallen from the tree,
 Fit to plant, and apt to grow;
But six of seven shall rot and die,
And never flourish to the sky,
 Or feel the breezes as they blow,
Choose the six—select the one—
Fool! you cannot! Fate must run!

II.

Seven sharp daggers, newly made,
 Each the other's counterpart,
Each the same in sheath and blade,
 Point and edge and workman's art;
And yet by Destiny's command,
One shall fill a murderer's hand,
 And stab a true man to the heart!
Choose the one—reject the rest—
Fool! you cannot! Fate knows best!

III.

Seven young maidens at the ball,
Radiant as the new May morn,
Blithe and joyous, one and all,
With lips of love, or eyes of scorn ;
Yet four of seven, when wedded wives,
Shall make their husbands curse their lives,
And rue the hour that they were born.
Show the four—select the three—
Fool ! you may not ! Live and see !





LIX.

IN THE STRAND AFTER LONG
ABSENCE—1875.

I.

FROM Charing Cross to Temple Bar,
Again I pace the well-known way ;
All things that were, and things that are,
Arise before me as I stray :
True, there are changes in the street—
Time *will* demolish brick and stone,
But still, unless my senses cheat,
'Tis the same Strand I've ever known.

II.

'Tis forty years since first I stood,
A boy with meditative stare,
And gazed in melancholy mood
At Percy's Lion from the Square.
Still on the house-top, tail erect,
It stands unharmed by lapse of Time,
While I look on and scarce suspect
That I'm no longer in my prime.

III.

I miss old Warren's blacking shop—

Where has the eternal Warren gone?

Puffs flourish in perennial crop,

But none puffs Warren—no, not one.

Times change. And though the public still

Is gulled by puffers as before,

It takes its ointment and its pill

And uses blacking as of yore.

IV.

Yes! Warren's gone—but neighbour Coutts

Still opes and shuts his dingy hall,

And seems to flourish, stems and roots,

And stands, whoever else may fall.

Once, as I passed, a foolish lad,

I thought a cheque my soul would bless,

Ten pounds a fortune, five not bad—

Five hundred now would please me less.

V.

And Weis, the cutler, lives he yet?

I know not, memory chills and fades;

But one thing I shall ne'er forget,

That knife with thrice a hundred blades.

There in the window, still it stands,

Cheap, I'd have thought it, I avow,

If purchased by a baron's lands—

I'd not give ninepence for it now.

VI.

And lower down, a little space,
That pickle shop I knew so well,
That filled the circumjacent place
With pungent, yet most fragrant smell.
It still drives on the ancient trade,
But Burgefs? Let me not be told—
I never knew him, I'm afraid—
But if he lives, he's wondrous old !

VII.

Here stand, and threaten long to stand,
The two obstructions of the town,
St. Clement's and St. Mary Strand,
Why don't they fell, and pull them down,
And build them rearward, not too near?
Time gallops, but Reform is slow,
Or Demolition's fatal cheer
Would have swept o'er them long ago.

VIII.

But who comes here ? an ancient Jew,
A dealer in rejected wares,
And old, old garments good as new,
Or better as he oft declares.
In times gone by, I've met him oft,
And watched him in his daily walk,
Enticing, prying, speaking soft,
And winning custom by his talk.

IX.

Joyous he was, and fair to see,
Oiled, prim, and neat, and jewelled much ;
And now he must be seventy-three,
Or seventy—and he needs a crutch.
Good gracious ! am I then so old
As to remember this old muff ?
My blood is warm, and his is cold !
I'll think no longer,—I've enough !





LX.

HARMONIES.

HAST thou not heard it, the universal music,
The throbbing harmonies, the old eternal rhyme,
In the wild billows roaring,
In the mad torrent pouring,
And keeping with the stars its tramp and march sublime ?

Haft thou not heard it, when the night was silent
And nothing stirred but wind among the trees,
And the star-orbits, strings of harps celestial,
Seemed quivering to the rush of melodies.

If in thy soul there pulses no faint responsive echo
To that supernal everlasting hymn,
Thou'rt of the low earth lowly,
Or livest life unholy,
Or dullest spiritual sense, by carnal grossness dim.

Hear it, O spirit ! hear it ; O preacher ! give it welcome ;
And, loving heart, receive it, deep in thine inmost core,
The harmony of Angels, glory, for ever glory,
Glory and Peace and Love—for ever, ever more !



THE VERY LAST SMOKE.

[A French teacher in Edinburgh, convicted of murdering his wife, requested that during the last half-hour preceding his execution, he might be allowed to smoke. A cigar was handed to him. Hence his reflections—*ex fumo*.]

THERE'S pleasure in a good cigar—
I'll smoke it ere I die,
And think meanwhile on life and death—
Under the fading sky.

Puff! I was once a happy boy,
And thought the world was fair,
Puff! Puff! I frolicked as I went,
In ignorance of care.

Puff! Puff! I won a blooming bride
One funny summer day;
The love was lovely for awhile
But cool'd and died away.

Puff! Puff! my spring-time quickly passed,
But I was strong and bold,
And toiled and toiled—and fought, and fought,
And conquered conquering gold!

Puff! Puff! I played a skilful game :
And when I'd nearly won,
I wakened from a gorgeous dream
To find myself undone !

Puff! Puff! I thought I would repent,
And I repented sore ;
Puff! 'twas in vain, I sinned again
As boldly as before.

Puff! Puff! The end approaches fast—
I do not fear to die—
I'll draw my last faint final whiff
Nor weep to say good-bye !

Have I no hope ? I think I have
That I may be forgiven !
Puff! Puff! my sin was dark and deep,
Have mercy—pitying Heaven !





LXII.

A LOVE EXTRAVAGANZA.

GROW greener, grafs, where the river flows—
Her feet have preſſed you :
Blow freſher, violet ! lily ! roſe !
Her eyes have bleſſed you.
Sing ſweeter, birds upon the trees,
Her ears have heard you :
Sound up to heaven, ye harmonies !
Her hands have ſtirred you.





LXIII.

VERY VIRTUOUS AND RESPECTABLE.

“YOU do not drink !” I know ! Drink boils the brain,
And business prospers best when you abstain !
“ You do not smoke !” I know the reason why,
Tobacco makes you bilious, like to die !
“ You’re no Lothario !” No,—the grapes are four,
Your blood is cold, you have outlived your hour.
“ You’re quite correct in all you say and do !”—
Perhaps, my Christian friend, my worse than Jew.
But then, while robed in unctuous self-content,
You lend your villain cash at cent. per cent.,
And would not give a five-pound note to save
Your luckless brother from a pauper’s grave.





LXIV.

MY WIFE'S PORTRAIT.

LOVELY one ! lovely one ! vanished for ever,
But fresh in my heart evermore,
I gaze on thy soul-speaking likeness,
And strive, in my thought, to restore
The beauty and grace that are hidden
In Death's evanescent eclipse,
And cheat my fond eyes by believing
I see the sweet smile on thy lips.
I kiss them,—as if they were living
With mine to commingle their breath—
And feel in the strength of my weakness
That love is the Master of Death.





LXV.

THE ACTOR.

THEY know not, as they see me
By the tap-room fire,
That I am Julius Cæsar
Clad in mean attire ;—
That I'm a mighty monarch
In my mind and thought ;
Drinking 'mid dull mechanics,
Weary and distraught.
But things, however thing-like,
Are not all they seem ;
These men are facts, I fancy—
I am but a dream !





LXVI.

QUITS.

YOU scorned the rose I gave you,
And threw it heedless by—
My heart was in the token,
And *yours* in the reply.
I've nothing more to ask you,
“Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye.”





LXVII.

THREE FASHIONABLE SISTERS.

I.

“**S**AY who you are, ye flaunting hags,
That walk beside us on the flags;
Who smile and grin, and fawn and sneer,
Or pump the sanctimonious tear;
Who sit beside us at the board
When meat is carved and wine is poured;
And e’en in church presume to kneel,
And sham the faith ye never feel?”

II.

“We’re friends well tried—we’re sisters three,
As old as human history;
But young and fresh as yester morn;
Ever dying, ever born.
In the glance of Satan’s eyes
We entered into Paradise,
And ever since have played our part
In the ill-furnished human heart.”

III.

“Our names—well known o’er land and sea,
Are Humbug, Cant, Hypocrisy !
We scatter falsehoods as we go,
To rich and poor, to high and low.
You find us here—you find us there—
To-day, to-morrow, everywhere ;
And ever shall, while men are men,
Or Eden opes its gates again.”





LXVIII.

SILENTLY AND SLOWLY.

SILENTLY and slowly
 Springs the tender grafs,
You cannot fee it growing
 As you pafs ;—
Silently and slowly
 Buds and leaves expand ;
Silently the daifies
 Gem the land ;—
Silently and slowly
 The feed produces fruit,
As Paff produces Future,
 From the root ;—
Silently and slowly
 The minutes pafs away,
And night, before we know it,
 Disposseffes day ;—
And fo, although we heed not,
 Juftice comes to all,
Smiting or requiting
 Great or small.



LXIX.

“*SANS SOUCI*” *VILLA*.

POOR fool! to write “*sans souci*” o’er your door!
 Whene’er you enter “*souci*” goes before,—
If not before (forgive the unwilling laughter),
I think I see him—creeping, sneaking after!





LXX.

BROKEN.

I'LL break my harp !—I'll sing no more !
The gentle music once I made,
Cannot be heard amid the roar
Of selfish and devouring trade.
When poor men cheat and rich men sneer,
And Mammon rules unquestioned lord,
Why vex the inattentive ear ?
Why strike the soul-inspiring chord ?

I'll break my harp—and if I'd seek
The wretched guerdon of renown,
I'll plaster pigments on my cheek
And bray coarse jests to please the town.
Sad harp ! be silent ! never more
Shalt thou respond to song divine !—
Loft are the harmonies of yore !
Hushed is thy music ; dead is mine !





LXXXI.

LOST REVERENCE.

GIVE back, O World ! O Fate ! O Time !
The priceless jewel of our fires,
Lost in the modern flush and slime
Where Mockery crawls and never tires !
Give back the Reverence for the old,
The great, the brave, the good, the true,
That speech affirmed, that manner told,
That eyes revealed, if words were few :
Give, give us back, O kindly Fate !
The power to cherish and revere,
Love is a nobler guide than Hate,
There is no wisdom in a sneer !





LXXII.

SHADOWS IN THE STREETS.

I.

THROUGH the rush of the roaring city
I roam by night or day, .
With memories sad or pleasant
Companions of my way.
I mix with the crowd of people
And following where they tread,
I watch them trample and jostle,
And fight with hand or head,
In the still recurring battle
For gold or daily bread.

II.

I pass the populous houses
In terrace or street or square,
I hear the rattle of chariots
And the sounds of life on the air ;
And up at the curtained windows
Where the flaring gaslights glow,
I see 'mid the flitting shadows
Of the guests that come and go,

The paler and dimmer shadows
Of the ghosts of the Long Ago.

III.

Here died a patriot statesman
High-priest of Freedom's cause,
And here a mighty poet
Who shaped a nation's laws :
Here flourished Wit and Beauty
And Learning, wide of ken,
And here a world's great teacher,
The lightnings of whose pen
Laid bare the hidden secrets
Too vast for common men.

IV.

And all the busy houses
By these no longer trod
Seem to my gaze like tombstones
Inscribed to them and God.
Their memories float around me,
And shed o'er many a spot,
Made dark by the blinding Present
That heeds or knows them not,
The haze of their bygone glories
Death-veiled,—but unforget.





LXXIII.

TO MY DAUGHTER SINGING.

A SONG is on thy lips, my love,
I know the song is mine,
But yet I'm doubtful as I hear
If 'tis not mostly thine—
I could not of myself approach
So near to the divine.





LXXIV.

PEBBLES.

“WHAT are the pebbles, old Father Time,
Thou’rt throwing in the river,
Thy river that flows without a tide
For ever and for ever ?”
“Pebbles ?” said Time. “Yes, pebbles they are—
Empires, kingdoms, thrones,
Heroes and poets whose fame was wide
As the circle of the zones ;
I cast them all in my rolling flood
That sparkles in the sun,
A little splash in the mighty stream—
A bubble, and all is done !”





LXXV.

PEARLS BEFORE A HOG.

WE passed the Chablis with the fish,
He drank and made no sign,
He was a man of mighty mark
That we had brought to dine.

We gave him Clicquot, dry and iced,
He sipped—not drained the glass;
And next we served Château Lafitte,—
He let the bottle pass.

What could be done with churl like this?
We tried the Clos Vougeot
And Carton Pierre, two royal drinks
That cheer our world of woe.

He drank, and said, “These wines, no doubt,
Are pleasant in their kind,
But to my taste a pint of beer
Were worth them all combined.”





LXXVI.

THE REASON WHY.

I F man is born to sorrow,
And flowers but bloom to die,
If fondest love is like them—
Wouldst ask the reason why?

If glory's but a sparkle,
And fame a fickle cry,
And life a restless nightmare,
Wouldst know the reason why?

Thou wouldst ! poor fool presumptuous !
Thy wing's too weak to fly
To height of such great riddles,
Ask not the reason why !

If sunshine light and cheer thee,
Why shouldst thou mope and sigh,
Because thou canst not fathom
The useless reason why !

The Cynic in his barrel
Was thankful for the sky,
Nor fought, in upstart wisdom,
For any reason why.

'Twere well to imitate him,
Though lowly, he was high ;
Mere life is worth possessing,
Although we know not why.

I'll smile if I am happy—
And if I'm sad I'll sigh,—
As careless as a shadow,
Nor ask the reason why !





LXXVII.

CANDID FRIENDS.

ASK no man to be *candid*, if you're wife !
If he be honest, he'll afflict your soul ;
And if dishonest, he will tell you lies,
And laud your vices—be they black as coal.
Candour that tells the truth both stings and galls,
But when it lies, it nauseates and palls.





LXXVIII.

A GREAT DOCTOR.

THERE'S one physician who can cure
All grief and pain that men endure ;
When doctors less expert than he
But trifle with our misery,
And hum and haw, and guess and grope,
And hint no remedy but hope ;
Wise doctor, lord of life and breath,
Friend of all sufferers—DOCTOR DEATH !





LXXIX.

GOOD OUT OF EVIL.

OUT of our poor dead vices
Some living virtues grow,
As the early snow-drops glisten
Beneath the thawing snow,
And glint and peep above it
Made fertile from below.





LXXX.

IN THE WILD WOOD.

YOU ask if I discover in the wood
Friends or companions of my solitude ;
I answer,—Many ! Friends most dear to me,
And comrades, kindly, beautiful and free.
The waving weeds, untroubled by the plough,
Catalpa blossoms pendent from the bough,
Like fairy bells that woo the winds to sing,
And hawthorn blooms, the darlings of the spring ;
Forget-me-nots—“ whose very name is sweet,”
The purple violets glinting at my feet,
And tall spear-heads amid the nodding grass ;
All these hold converse with me as I pass—
And I with them—unfolding in my sight,
Born of earth’s joy, and babies of the light !
Nor them alone. Far fairer flowers than they
Meet me and cheer me on my joyous way.
Eyes cannot see them—but the soul can find,—
Blossoms of the heart and angels of the mind,
That stir the leaves, that whisper from the sod
Content and Peace, and Love of man and God.



LXXXI.

CARELESS—NOT VACANT MINDED.

I DWELL in peace amid my garden paths,
Friend of the flowers and feathered songsters fair
Rejoicing in the sunshine and the verdure,
And the embracing beauty of the air.
And if the weather drenches, I am glad
To study history in my old arm-chair ;
Or talk with Plato and the bards of yore,
Dead in the flesh, but living evermore.





LXXXII.

POPULARITY: A DIALOGUE.

I.

“’TIS great to be the idol of the crowd,
To live, and living, have one’s claim allowed,
To rank above the herd of common men
By conquests of our arm, our voice, our pen,”
Said Brown complacently—“Such fate is mine!
My poems sell, and critics all combine
To recognise them as the true divine.”

II.

But, Brown! my worthy friend, reflect awhile,
Ere you out-value fickle fortune’s smile—
That popular favour is not merit’s test,
And sometimes calls the worst the very best;
And that a thousand fools are sooner found
Than ten wise men upon the crowded ground,
Where donkeys bray, and whisk their ears around.

III.

And tell me, Brown! ere you exult too much
Because the crowd makes answer to your touch,—

If "Punch and Judy" does not please it more
Than Shakipeare's glories that the few adore ;
And if the many visiting Tuffaud
Do not prefer a murderer at her show
To nude Apollo with his bended bow ?





LXXXIII.

IN THE VILLA.

THE maids are laughing down below,
 Their wage both high and sure,
And sometimes if they think at all,
 They think they're very poor :
They groan that they've no cash to buy
 Red ribbons for their hair,
Or tawdry filks, to walk abroad
 On Sunday when it's fair.

Poor little grief ! 'Tis all they know ;
 While *he*, the master sad,
Sits in his study all alone
 And thinks he's going mad.
His fortunes dwindle day by day,
 His credit's at an end,
And his last hope has failed him thrice—
 The " friendship " of a friend.

To-morrow, Ruin's bolt will fall
 On his predestined head,
When bankrupt, desolate and shamed,
 He'll wish that he were dead.

The girls will get another place,
And giggle as before,
While he will sink into the depths,
Or pass the prison door,
Perhaps to die—well—that were best !
The world wags evermore !





LXXXIV.

A TRIAD OF LOVE LYRICS.

I.

THE GENTLE TYRANT.

GIVE all your love, or none of it,
I claim nor more, nor less,
The whole wide empire of your heart
To hold and to possess.
I brook no partial share in what
Should be entirely mine;
He scorns divided loyalty
Who rules by right divine.

No shade of love that went before,
No fancy even must stand,
Betwixt me and the perfect truth
I covet at your hand.
'Tis all, or nothing, that I crave,
And if your thought rebel,
Friendship may linger if it will,
But Love must say farewell !

11.

FAIR AND CRUEL.

Your eyes the morning light eclipse,
Your smiles compel us to adore,
Wit and good humour curve your lips—
What would you more?

All women praise you or approve,
All men your fav'ring glance implore,
You scatter joy where'er you move—
What would you more?

To know you, is your love to crave,
I love you from the heart's deep core;
Your scorn will drive me to the grave—
What would you more?

111.

"Love me little, love me long,"
Is the burthen of a song
That never shall be song of mine,
Or whispered from my heart to thine;
Greater bliss I crave and claim—
No glow-worm's lamp, but living flame
Must feed the fires our souls implore—
So love me much, for evermore!



LXXXV.

A SECTARIAN PHILOSOPHER.

“**A**N undevout astronomer is mad,”
Sang the great Poet. Is it not as sad
To think, star-gazing, that the God of Love
Who launched the glorious orbs that roll above,
Who peopled earth, and tuned the heavenly choirs
Will damn us all to everlasting fires,
Except the few who think themselves th’ Elect,
To enter Heaven through keyhole of a Sect?
Answer me that—astronomer purblind!
Nor think the stars too small for all mankind.





LXXXVI.

THE OLD PHILOSOPHER.

“ I’VE passed,” quoth he, “ threescore and ten,
And ever since my boyhood’s hour,
Have fought among the sons of men
To win the knowledge that is power :—
Fought, but not conquered ! All I know
Seems but a germ that might expand,
If seven times seventy years were mine
To think, and strive to understand.”





LXXXVII.

THE WIND AND THE WIRES.

A QUESTION AND REPLY.

I.

The Question.

“ I WONDER,” said a little child
That frolicked by the way,
“ Whether the winds that wander wild,
Have anything to say ?
Whether they talk, or sigh, or sing,
Or strike the flats and sharps
Upon the telegraphic string,
Like fingers upon harps ? ”

II.

The Reply.

“ Come hither, hither ! maiden mine !
And if you seek to know
Why vagrant winds in shade or shine
Make music as they go,
And what they say to the answering wires,
As o’er the chords they sweep,

H

Hopes, fancies, prophecies, desires,
Or memories fond and deep :

III.

“ I'll tell you truly what I think
And fain would understand,
Things verging on the unknown brink
Of the dim and shadowy land ;
Things of the present or the past,
Or of the days to be,
Beautiful all, but vague and vast,
As veiled infinity.

IV.

“ They seem to say, if I hear aright,
In murmuring rise or fall,
That Nature's law is Life and Light,
And Love the lord of all ;
That silent skies have power of speech,
And that the earth and stars
Hold high communion each with each,
From all their whirling cars.

V.

“ Inaudible to human ears
Is their angelic song,
Which sounds for ever through the spheres,
That know nor short, nor long,
Nor time, nor distance, up nor down,
Nor fixity of place,
The gems in God's eternal crown,
That flash through endless space.

VI.

“ I listen to the chanted prayer,
And three short words reveal
The secret which the winds declare
And strong in faith I feel.
Echoes assured, though faint and dim,
That reach us from above,
Tones of the everlasting hymn
That tells us ‘ God is Love.’ ”





LXXXVIII.

THE LONG, LONG, LONG AGO.

I.

FAINT from afar come the echoes
Of the long, long, long ago,
They whisper in the foliage,
As it trembles to and fro,
Or swoon on the heart of midnight,
When the wild winds come and go,
All, all the tender fancies
Of the long, long, long ago.

II.

Alas ! that we cannot recall them
In their early youthful glow !
Nor the faces of those who loved us
In the happy long ago !
They dwindle away to shadows—
We know them, yet fail to know,
Fading, vanishing, dying,
In the mists of the long ago !



LXXXIX.

AN OLD FRIEND.

YOU call me *old* ! Well, as to ages,
No doubt there's difference between ;
'Tis true, my friend, when I was thirty
You were my junior at nineteen.
But age, though counted by the winters,
Has other measures quite as true,
There's heart, there's love—by these I reckon
I'm much the younger of the two.





XC.

THE HAMMER.

THE red-hot iron on the anvil lay,—
'Twas I,—waisting my fiery soul away.
A heavy hammer in a brawny hand,
Fell hard upon me, grievous to withstand,
And from the iron, rushing fierce and fair,
Ten thousand sparks lit up th' embracing air.
The metal was my soul; the hammer-blows
Afflictions, and calamities, and woes;
The flashing sparks were gems from sorrow wrung;
Thoughts, fancies, hopes, and all the songs I've sung.





XCI.

WILD SUPPOSITIONS.

SUPPOSE that Eve had never eaten
The fruit of the forbidden tree,
Suppose that Noah's Ark had foundered
With all on board in open sea ;

Suppose that in this world of struggle
Eating and drinking were unknown,
And that our vigour, health, and beauty
Could be sustained on air alone ;

Suppose that men, like bees and monkeys,
Had never kindled flame or fire,
That printing had not been invented,
To teach the nations to aspire ;

Suppose that brave Columbus never
Had cared to tempt the western seas ;
And then suppose what might have happened
In such contingencies as these ;—

And, maddest, wildest supposition
That ever gleamed in human mind,

Suppose that since the days of Adam
Men had done justice to mankind !

That ever since the world was fashioned
They had been true and good and wise !
God blefs us ! Earth, no longer earthly,
Would have been perfect Paradise.





XCII.

THE BRAVE STRUGGLE

I'VE looked on Poverty undismayed,
His cold breath on my cheek,
I've seen him crouching at my bed,
When winds blew shrill and bleak ;
I've watched him crawling to my board,
To snatch my scanty food,
But never suffered him—no, not once—
To scare me where I stood ;
But fought him, upright, like a man
That only feared disgrace ;
And hit him hard, and laid him low
And scorned him to his face !
I've struggled, sure of victory,
In pride, although in pain,
With soul serene, and head erect,
And so I will again.





XIII.

NEVER GROW OLD.

I LOOKED in the tell-tale mirror,
And saw the marks of care,
The crows' feet and the wrinkles,
And the grey in the dark-brown hair.
My wife looked o'er my shoulder,
Most beautiful was she,
"Thou wilt never grow old, my love," she said,
"Never grow old to me.

"For age is the chilling of heart,
And thine, as mine can tell,
Is as young and warm as when first we heard
The sound of our bridal bell!"
I turned and kissed her ripe red lips:
"Let time do its worst on me,
If in my soul, my love, my faith,
I never seem old to thee!"





XCIV.

A ROYAL GRIEVANCE.

ONCE in my dreams I was a king,
Great, powerful, and adored,
Wife in the council, gay in hall,
And mighty with the sword.
But as it happens among kings,
And smaller folk than they,
There was a bitter in my cup,
A shadow on my day.

Fate had decreed that if I smiled
I'd be my people's scoff,
That if I dared to scratch myself
My crown would topple off;
That if a servant or a friend
Should scratch me in my stead,
Worse doom would fall with double strength
On my devoted head.

Great were my sufferings ! All my joys
Diminished one by one,
I thought myself the veriest wretch
That crawled beneath the sun.

At length I cried, " I'll be no king,
At penalty like this !"
I laughed, I scratched, and woke once more
To liberty and bliss !





xcv.

NO! NOT FOR GOLD!

I.

[The tale told in these stanzas is literally true. It is recorded in the "Shipwreck of the Juno" by William Mackay in 1798. Byron borrowed from it the incidents in the shipwreck in "Don Juan." Thomas Moore preferred the simple and unaffected prose narrative of the sailor to Byron's poetry.]

FIFTY souls on board! aloft in the rigging and spars,
In the water-logged vessel, idly afloat in the bay,
With only one barrel of biscuits and two little water-jars
To feed them, alas! for many a weary day!
Water enough for an hour, if none should come from
the clouds,
Which, mocking their sorrow, had long refused to rain,
And they clung to the creaking masts and the cramping
shrouds,
Alive, though dying slowly in the grip of the hunger pain.

II.

They doled out the biscuit fairly, patient and true and
brave,
To each man and woman a portion, and the little cabin
boy,

And when the merciless noon burned fiercely down on
the wave,
They doled out the dwindling water, each drop a blessing
and joy :
And the poor little lad drank, smiling, his small allotted
share,
But, far too feeble to eat, hid the biscuit away in his vest,
While the ravenous crew, with their wolfish eyes aglare,
Could have eaten him up with his biscuit and thought it
for the best.

III.

The captain's wife in the rigging, a buxom woman and
strong,
Had fifteen hundred guineas sewed up in the belt she
wore ;
“ Poor little Willie ! ” she said, “ your biscuit will last you
long,
Give me one half of a biscuit for half my golden store !
Nay, *all* my golden guineas.” — “ Ah no ! ” said the
forrowful child,
“ I want to live a little, though life is very forlorn ;
I cannot eat your guineas, my head seems running wild,
But I think I'll eat my biscuit, to-night or to-morrow
morn ! ”





XCVI.

ALL FOR MYSELF.

PROUD world ! no gifts I bring to thee !
My songs I do not sing to thee !
Nor bear thee in my thought !
My song, this sunny morning,
Is not for thy adorning,
Nor from thine echoes caught !
It floats not on thy breath
Either for life or death ;
But with all its passionate measure,
Its pulse, its throb, its start,
Is only for *my* pleasure
And the soothing of *my* heart !





XCVII.

EHEU ! MISERRIMI !

LOVE is the great disturber of the world !
It leads to life, and life produces death,—
Life is but sorrow, and our sorrows come
With the first drawing of the infant breath.
If we crave beauty as a thing to bless,
If we crave peace 'mid storms that rise and rave,
What is so beautiful as nothingness ?
What is so quiet as the pitying grave ?

There is no nothingness in Earth or Heaven.
There is no rest, nor triumph in the tomb,
Life throbs and pulses through the eternal spheres,
And Death but leads us through the earthly gloom
To the immortal home for which we yearn,
From whence we came, and whither we return :
Rest is not ours, nor ending of endeavour,
But joy and work, for ever and for ever !





XCVIII.

HAMLET.

[An American author, in a volume published in 1881, suggested, as a probable explanation of the inconsistencies and weaknesses in the character of Hamlet, that Shakspeare's original intention might have been to portray the Prince as a girl masquerading as a man. Hence the following lines.]

MY mother should have known me? Well, she did.
But for some hidden purpose of her own
She called me boy; and as I grew in years
I liked the garb: it gave me liberty
And scope for action in the busy world,
Where the good sword oft betters the good word.
Men are the masters in this petty sphere,
And women slaves. I will not be a slave
If a man's hose and sword can make me free!
So now my secret's yours.





XCIX.

CHILDLESS.

I.

THERE stands a castle by the shore,
Rich with the memories of yore.
Weary, oh weary, and woe is me !
And in it dwells a lady rare,
Pure and lovely, with golden hair,
By the sad waves plashing wearily.

II.

The master is a Baron bold,
Gallant and young, with store of gold ;
Weary, oh weary, and woe is he !
Store of all that man can crave
To cheer the pathway to the grave,
By the sad waves plashing wearily.

III.

The lady bright is kind and good,
The paragon of womanhood,

Weary, ah weary, and woe is ſhe !
 And her wedded lord is leal and fure,
 Beloved alike of rich and poor,
By the ſad waves plaſhing wearily.

IV.

There dwells a fiſherman on the ſtrand,
 In a little cot with a rood of land ;
Merry, oh merry, and briſk is he !
 With his bonnie wife and his romping boys,
 Who climb to his knees with a pleaſant noiſe,
By the wild waves plaſhing cheerily.

V.

And the lady of the caſtle fighs
 When ſhe meets the fiſherwife's gladdening eyes.
Weary, oh weary, and woe is ſhe !
 And wiſhes that Heaven, to bleſs her life,
 Had made her mother as well as wife,
By the wild waves plaſhing wearily.

VI.

The lord of the caſtle, riding home
 O'er the hard ſea ſand where the breakers foam,
Weary, oh weary, and woe is he !
 Oft fees the fiſher, his labour done,
 Sit with his wife in the glint o' the ſun
By the wild waves plaſhing cheerily :

VII.

Sit with his wife and his boys and girls,
Kissing their cheeks, and twining their curls.

Weary, oh weary, and woe is he !
And turns his envious eyes aside,
And well-nigh weeps for all his pride
By the wild waves plashing wearily.

VIII.

I'd give, thinks he, my rank and state,
My wealth, that little men call so great,

Weary, oh weary, and woe is me !
Could I but know this fisherman's joys,
A wife to love, and girls and boys,
By the wild waves plashing cheerily.





C.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

[The name of the heroic piper whose deed is here recorded, and whom I knew in my early youth, was, if I remember rightly, John Clark. The incident occurred at the battle of Vittoria, 1813.]

A HIGHLAND piper, shot through both his feet,
Lay on the ground in agonizing pain,
The cry was raised, "*The Highlanders retreat—
They run! they fly! they rally not again!*"
The piper heard, and rising on his arm,
Clutched to his heart the pipes he loved so well,
And blew a blast—a dirge-like thrill alarm,
That quickly changed to the all-jubilant swell
Of Tullochgorum. Swift as lightning flash,
Or fire in stubble, the tumultuous sound
Thrilled through the clansmen's hearts, and with a dash
Of unreflecting valour, at one bound
They turned upon their hot pursuing foes,
And faced them with one wild tempestuous cheer,
That almost drowned the music, as it rose
Defiant o'er the field, loud, long, and clear!

Scotland was in it, and the days of old,
When, to the well-remembered pibrochs of their hills,

They danced the exultant reel on hill-sides cold,
Or warmed their hearts with patriotic fires.
The startled enemy, in sudden dread,
Staggered and paused, then, pale with terror, fled !
The clansmen followed ;—hurling shout on shout
In martial madness on the hopeless rout.
'Twas but five minutes ere the set of fun,
And ere it sank the victory was won !
Glory and honour, all that men can crave,
Be thine, O Piper, bravest of the brave !





CI.

HENRY DE BOURBON (died 1883).

1873.

WELL done! great Henry! great in abnegation,
Great in assertion of a life-long thought,
Great in the fearless, calm renunciation
Of crown and throne that should be given, not
bought ;
Great that you would not condescend to utter
What you believed not, for dominion's prize,
Or stoop to snatch a sceptre from the gutter,
Blood sprinkled, filth encrusted, where it lies.

Great Henry, firm, unselfish, and as pure
In conscience as the old historic flag,
That with a noble childishness you'd lure
To its old place, to shame a rival rag.
The age is sordid, selfish, base, and mean.
You, the true prince, high in eclipsed estate,
Give it example, and with soul serene
Teach it that honesty alone is great !



CII.

THE OLD POET'S LAST RESOURCE.

I.

STAND in the corner, thou sturdy old broom-stick !

Perhaps I shall need thee some cold winter day,
Perhaps my support thou wilt be, and my doom-stick

When maimed and defeated in Life's cruel fray.

My songs and my books may not yield me a penny,

But while thou art mine I've a prop and a trust.

My humblest of friends, sole survivor of many !

I look to thee yet to procure me a crust.

II.

I know, in Pall Mall, a fair crossing, much trodden,

With gutters to clear when the rain ruffles down,

Where peers and rich merchants and bankers wealth-fodden

All pass and repass in the tide of the town.

There I will station me, proud as my betters,

If betters I have in the wearisome throng ;

Sweeping pays better than wisdom or letters.

So, up with the broom-stick ! and down with the song !



CIII.

TRUE RICHES.

GOLD is not wealth, nor all the gems
That shine on royal diadems,
Though while they last they're good and fair.
But Love is wealth beyond compare !
Health, Hope, and Love, the lord of these
Has empire wider than the seas !
To him all griefs are small and mean,
He rules them with a soul serene,
Nor lets their shadow come between
Him and these bright foretastes of heaven,
The heritage that God has given !





CIV.

EUTHANASIA.

LET me die in the strength of life,
In the fulness of my story,
In the midst of the battle strife,
With the pen or the sword of glory.
Let me not linger forlorn,
A burden to those who love me,
But with hope beaming bright as morn
From the cheerful sky above me,
Mount to my home in heaven
Amid angelic voicing,
To be heard of my soul forgiven
As it goes on its way rejoicing.





CV.

OLD EIGHTY-EIGHT.

HOW is it, brisk old Eighty-eight,
You wear so well and wear so late,
When Seventy-three goes creeping by
With feeble step and fading eye?

“When I was young,” the old man said,
“I had a calm, sagacious head,
And all my life I’ve kept it cool,
And curbed Desire by Reason’s rule.
Though oft I’ve heard my neighbours groan,
I’ve felt no sorrow but my own;
Nor had a sweetheart, child, or wife,
To vex the current of my life.”

Old Eighty-eight, you may live on
Till your full hundred years be gone;
And when you sleep you may depend
One rug will wrap your only friend.
But as for me, I’d rather die
At forty, than like hog in sty,
Unmanly, selfish, and untrue,
Live such a life as pleases you.



CVI.

WORK.

YOU say I overload my brain
By stress of work, that works in vain.
You may be right. I think you're wrong.
Work is a pleasure to the strong.
Weary of walking, I can run,
And make good end of well-begun ;
Can leave false history for romance,
That's just as false, or true, perchance ;
And then I dive in the deep deep sea
And float on the billows of Poesy,—
Changing the work, and working ever,
But worn and weary, never ! never !





CVII.

THOU ART NOT FAIR. .

THOU art not fair with all thy red and white
While curls thy shapely nose with faucyicorn ;
Thou art not lovely, though thine eyes so bright
Might, as thy flatterers say, outshine the morn,
If from their orbs the quivering hate and spite
Reveal the furnace where their fires were born.

No, Lady, no! not all the golden hair,
Streaming in plenteous wavelets to the hips,
Can render beautiful or passing fair
One who breathes falsehood from her rosy lips.
Beauty and Goodness, super-heavenly pair,
Dwell side by side, and suffer no eclipse.





CVIII.

VERSE AND POETRY.

VERSE is but fire that crackles on the ground,
Or from a parlour grate sheds warmth around ;
But Poetry's the lightning-flash on high,
When thunder rides exultant o'er the sky,
And bursting clouds disclose, all rent and riven,
The awful pomp and majesty of Heaven.





CIX.

PARDON.

The First Thought.

IF we knew all, we'd pardon all ;
If man say this, and spare the rod,
Is not the mind perverse and small
That does not think the same of God ?

The Second Thought.

God never pardons ! 'tis beyond His power,
Unless He break the law Himself decreed.
Twin born, and creatures of one pregnant hour,
Are guilt and penalty for guilty deed.
Justice, not vengeance, is the Lord of all !
Crime and its punishment, conjoined for ever,
Fly on one arrow, be it great or small,
And Heaven itself may separate them never.





CX.

THE DAISY CHORUS.

THE myriad daisies on the lawn
Slept with closed petals all the night,
Expecting that the punctual dawn
Would flush the world with rosy light.
But when the morn broke dark and chill,
The daisies felt that storm was nigh,
And kept their petals folded still,
To shun the rigours of the sky.

Yet when the noon-tide sun dispersed
The tearful clouds that dimmed its ray,
The imprisoned petals open burst,
In grateful homage to the day;
And lo! amid the grass I heard
A tender sound of music swell,
That spoke without an uttered word,
And sweetly rose and gently fell.

'Twas but the fancy of a dream
That shaped itself into a song,
The ripple of a quivering stream,
That flowed in music all day long.

It seemed to say, "Bright Lord of Day!
Glory and praise to Thee be given!
Glory and love to God above,
And to the light that comes from heaven."





CXI.

A BACHELOR'S MONO-RHYME.

DO you think I'd marry a woman
That can neither cook nor sew,
Nor mend a rent in her gloves
Or a tuck in her furbelow ;
Who spends her time in reading
The novels that come and go ;
Who tortures heavenly music,
And makes it a thing of woe ;
Who deems three-fourths of my income
Too little, by half, to show
What a figure she'd make, if I'd let her,
'Mid the belles of Rotten Row ;
Who has not a thought in her head
Where thoughts are expected to grow,
Except of trumpery scandals
Too small for a man to know ?
Do you think I'd wed with *that*,
Because both high and low
Are charmed by her youthful graces
And her shoulders white as snow ?
Ah no ! I've a wish to be happy,
I've a thousand a year or so,

'Tis all I can expect
That fortune will bestow !
So, pretty one, idle one, stupid one !
You're not for me, I trow,
To-day, nor yet to-morrow,
No, no ! decidedly no !





CXII.

KISSING THE THIMBLE.

I KISSED the thimble my true love wore,
My love that lies in the grave,
My love with the dainty little hand,
With a heart in it true and brave.
My love ! my love ! my dear dear love,
So womanly pure and bright,
With a laugh like heavenly music,
With a smile like the morning light,
With a kiss like heaven's fulfilment,
Come down to my touch and fight !





CXIII.

DOGS.

WERE there no dogs, mankind would lose some
teachers

Of truth, as clear as the blue heavens above,
Dumb, but not speechless, mute but eloquent preachers
Of the great gospel of unselfish love.





CXIV.

UNDER THE OLD OAK TREE.

MARCH 31, 1881.

I.

WHAT faith the wild March wind to thee,
As he blusters and raves in thy branches free,
Thou stately, beautiful, old oak tree?
I fancy I hear as he gallops along,
Anthem and psalm, and jubilant song,
As his voice makes answer back to thine,
In a symphony divine.

II.

Is it but fancy, if we deem
That flower and tree and fform and stream,
And, twinkling up in the depths afar,
Planet with planet, star with star,
Have silent voices each to each,
And that vain men who prate and preach
Have no monopoly of speech?

III.

Speaks not the torrent to the rock,
Speaks not the cloud to the thunder shock,

Speaks not the billow to the shore,
Moaning and sorrowing evermore ;
Speaks not the wild March wind to thee,
And thou to it in converse free,
Thou stately, beautiful, old oak tree ?





CXV.

HAPPY, THOUGH UNHEEDED.

I'M told that I write and sing
 When nobody hears or heeds ;
Perhaps 'tis true, but the world's applause
 Is not among my needs.
Does the lark on the edge of the cloud
 Sing for the cow-boy's pleasure ;
Or the nightingale tune for the passing churl
 Its full impassioned measure ;
Or great Niagara evermore
 Intone its awful rhyme,
Merely to charm the passers-by
 With its psalmody sublime ?





CXVI.

MY OWN JEWELS.

THE rich blind man speaks ill of me,
Because he thinks I'm poor,
Well ! tell him that I'm hale and strong
And able to endure.
Tell him besides, that I possess
Two jewels clear and bright,
That I'd not sell for thrice his wealth
Or all the world's delight;
Tell him, I think he's wrong to scorn
My poverty and me ;
And that if eyes outvalued gold,
I'm richer far than he.





CXVII.

IN A WARM BATH.

DAYS dawn when I detest the world
And everything that Time produces,
When men seem knaves, and women worse,
And nothing serves for goodly uses;
When every tongue propounds a lie,
And malice taints the fairest faces,
When sun and moon are cold and dark,
And demons climb to Heaven's high places.

But when this blight afflicts my soul,
I take a bath, and revel in it,
And all the evil fancies fade,
One after other, by the minute;
My brain grows cool,—my pulse beats calm,
The world regains its bygone favour;
And feeling I've grown wise once more,
I take my fellows back to favour.





CXVIII.

TOBACCO.

Fitz-Noodle (smoking).

TOBACCO is a calm and gentle weed ;
No man, when smoking pipe or good cigar,
E'er dreamed of suicide or murderous deed,
Or left the gates of Conscience so ajar,
That hate or frenzy could come roaring in,
To goad the soul to misery and sin.

Fitz-Boodle (not smoking).

Granted, good friend ! tobacco soothes the brain,
It prompts no death ; but when the smoke-wreath
mounts,
Doth no one plot (perchance not all in vain)
To forge and swindle and to cook accounts ?
Brother, be wise ! I heed the word you spoke,
'Tis fraud, not murder, that is not born of smoke !





CXIX.

UNAPPRECIATED.

I STAND alone : I have no clique to fetter me.
I give no dinners, am not known to lords,
I court not the society of critics,
Nor seek the favour which their voice affords.
I do not pander to the weary fashion
That sneers and jeers at all that's good and true,
I do not vaunt myself, or blow my trumpet,
In any great or any small review ;
The present knows me not ; the future may—
What will it matter to my senseless clay ?





CXX.

ONCE ON A TIME.

“ONCE on a time !” the good old fairy phrase
Took my heart captive in my childhood’s days ;
And now in older hours, my joys of youth,
My funny hopes, my disappointed truth,
My fairy loves, so beautiful to see,
Sound the dull chorus of dead vanity !
“ Once on a time ! ” oh, time that I deplore,
Gone,—gone,—for ever ! to return no more !





CXXI.

NO ENEMIES.

YOU have no enemies, you say ?
Alas ! my friend, the boast is poor :
He who has mingled in the gray
Of duty, that the brave endure,
Musi have made foes ! If you have none,
Small is the work that you have done,
You've hit no traitor on the hip,
You've dashed no cup from perjured lip,
You've never turned the wrong to right,
You've been a coward in the fight.





CXXII.

EDUCATION.

YOUR education is complete, you think ?

Dunce that you are ! and dunce you're doomed to be
As long as, dabbling on the shallow brink,

You think you're sailing on the wide, wide sea.
I've striven to know, and, finding knowledge sweet,

Have learned a hundred times as much as you,
And yet I feel I've only wet my feet,

With all broad ocean stretched before my view.





CXXIII.

TO A VERY HARD SECTARIAN.

CANST thou confine the sunshine to thy fields,
Or bid the generous clouds that drop the rain
Leave thy next neighbour's acres all intact,
And pour their treasures upon thine alone?
Thou canst not, fool! and yet thou'dst circumscribe
God's love within the limits of thy sect,
And damn the alien universe to Hell.





CXXIV.

A GRAVE.

ALL that I want
Is little to grant,
And dear Mother Earth,
From her ample girth,
Can spare it, I ween ;
And build it strong,
Six feet long
And two between :
A small estate
Given to the great,
But free to the little when all is done,
Birth-right and death-right—both in one.





CXXV.

THE HIGHEST PLACE.

THE king sat on his lofty throne,
In all his pomp and state;
The footstool beggar on the stone
That flanked the garden gate.
The king was false to do and plan,
And treacherous through and through :
The beggar was an honest man,
And loved the good and true.
'Mid all the splendour of the throne
With flatterers at its base,
The good old beggar on the stone
Sat in the nobler place.





CXXVI.

A SONG WITHOUT AN "S."

[The sibilations of the English language, the plurals of nouns, and the third person singular of the verb, all ending in *s*, are the horror of vocalists, and the despair of musicians. An attempt is made in the following to show that the difficulty of eliminating the *s* in lyrical composition, though great, is not insuperable.]

COME meet me in the gloaming,

And happy it will be,

Out in the mellow moonlight

To roam the wild wood free,

Forgetting care and trouble,

With thee, my love, with thee.

I will impart my hope,

And feel it will be thine,

That all of thee, and all of me,

May mingle and combine,

For ever and for ever

In unity divine.

In unity complete

Of will and fair endeavour,

Fond love and true delight

To be unmingled never :

I'm thine ! oh, love, be mine,

For ever and for ever !



CXXVII.

CRITIQUES OR CRITICS.

I.

GREAT AUTHORITIES.

THREE swine lay wallowing in the mire,
As fat as farmer could desire ;
When one pig to the other said,
“ Dost see the warm sun overhead ?
Men call him great and wondrous fine,
Noble, glorious, and divine ;
In my opinion, men are wrong,
And pile their epithets too strong.”

“ And in mine, too,” said pig the second ;
“ The sun’s less mighty than he’s reckoned.
’Tis true he flares, and gives us light,
But then he disappears at night !
And, to my thought, more lovely far
Is the pale moon, or evening star,
They are not fierce enough to kill,
We can look at them when we will ;
But not at him, so proud and hot,
He’d strike us blind as soon as not.”

“ I quite agree,” said pig the third ;
“ Of course, his merits all have heard ;
But no one tells of his disgrace,
Th’ intemperate blotches on his face !
The fevers and the plagues he fends,
In short, he’s flattered by his friends !
He’s bright, no doubt, and all the rest,
But, to my thinking, moonlight’s best ! ”

II.

PLAGIARISM.

If I’ve a taper that I light
Where other tapers shine,
Am I a thief and plagiarist ?
And is the light not mine ?
And if my taper shed a ray
Much brighter than the first,
Is taper number one the best,
And mine the very worst ?

You say my thoughts in Homer lurk
Perhaps ! but I’d be told,
Where honest Homer found his thoughts,
And were they new or old ?
The skylark sang in Homer’s time !
I hear it in the blue,
Did this day’s lark rob Homer’s lark ?
Sweet critic, tell me true.

III.

KNOWLEDGE.

What knows the critic of the book ?
 As much, it may be, as the rook,
 Perched on the high cathedral tower,
 Knows of the solemn organ's power
 That heaves below with tides of sound,
 Ebbing and flowing all around ;
 As much, it may be, as at Rome,
 The fly upon St. Peter's dome
 Knows of the architect's design,
 Who planned and built that fane divine !

IV.

A VERY DIFFERENT THING.

Smith stood before a prosperous butcher's shop
 To warn intending purchasers away,
 " Buy nothing here, nor joint, nor steak, nor chop,
 Bad meat, short weight, and over much to pay."
 The butcher heard him, and his wrath was strong,
 And suing Smith for libel, it was found,
 That such trade injury and grievous wrong
 Required the solace of a thousand pound.

The same old Smith wrote much for the Reviews,
 Nothing could please him, whether prose or verse,
 He loved to snarl, to cavil and abuse,
 And never read a book except to curse.

A poet asked, " Shall this man slander me
And all my books, without the law's relief ? "
Law answered " Yes ! " Opinion must be free
On poem and romance ; but not on BEEF !

V.

THE ICONOCLASTS.

Revile him, decry him ! he's better than you !
Disparage and scorn him, he's noble and true !
He has wrought the dull marble to beauty sublime,
He has poured his full soul into passionate rhyme,
He has written a book that shall comfort the poor,
As long as our language and name shall endure !
He is high ! pull him down ! and if dogs in the night
That howl at the moon for her beautiful light,
Can harm the fair planet that vexes their ken,
Oh, then ye shall damage him, then, my boys, then !

VI.

HOMER AND SHAKSPEARE.

" A dream, which was not all a dream ! "
Homer and Shakspeare, mighty pair,
Passed o'er my presence like a gleam
Of moonlight on the summer air.

And hark ! they spoke ! 'Twas Homer first :
" What silly fools are men ! " he said,
" Neglecting living worth, to burst
In thunderous praises of the dead !

I never wrote the Iliad, no!
Only some ballads which I sung
For daily bread, long long ago
When Greece was valorous and young.

“ As time wore on my ballads grew
By small addition line on line,
And swoll to bulk I never knew,
And swelling, were no longer mine.
I loathe the Iliad ! but the ruck
Of pedants trumpet it aloud ;
Dear Shakspeare, is it wit or luck
That makes us favourites of the crowd ? ”

“ Dear Homer ! ” said the younger bard,
“ Fame’s but a word at random spread,
It leaves our best in disregard,
And vaunts our very worst instead.
My poems ! darlings of my heart !
Men spurn or utterly ignore,
But plays I did not write, impart
Joy to dense donkeys by the score.

“ They bray, they prate in long debate,
And call poor drivel quite divine,
Only because, whoever wrote,
They’ve learned to think the drivel mine.
Are there no critics to be born
Bright as the sunshine, clear as dew,
Who without prejudice or scorn
Will hold the balance fairly true ? ”

“Never!” said Homer; “never more!
The race has perished from the sod.
But why lament them, or deplore?
There are no critics left but God!”





CXXVIII.

THE GOURD AND THE PALM.

“ **H**OW old art thou ? ” said the garrulous gourd,
As o’er the palm-tree’s crest it poured
Its spreading leaves and tendrils fine,
And hung a bloom in the morning shine.
“ A hundred years ! ” the palm-tree sighed.
“ And I,” the saucy gourd replied,
“ Am at the most a hundred hours,
And overtop thee in the bowers ! ”

Through all the palm-tree’s leaves there went
A tremor as of self-content.
“ I live my life,” it whispering said ;
“ See what I see, and count the dead ;
And every year of all I’ve known,
A gourd above my head has grown,
And made a boast like thine to-day,
And here I stand—but where are they ? ”





CXXIX.

*TO ONE WHO BOASTED THAT HE "KNEW
THE WORLD."*

YOU know the world? you know it not at all!

 You never struggled hard in misery's grip,
Or found in fortune's draught the poisonous gall,
 When its bright chalice sparkled at your lip.

You know the world? you ne'er at rise of sun

 Looked in your empty cupboard, and with dread
Thought of the children that, ere day was done,
 Might vainly ask you for a crust of bread.

You know the world? you never knew despair

 Creep through your veins to seize upon your soul,
And had to fight him off through storms of care,
 And agonies beyond your self-control.

You know the world? you never madly loved,

 And still loved on, till love became despair;
Nor drained your heart of tears when death removed
 The life-long partner of your fondest care.

Vain ! oh, most vain ! your false misleading boast
Of selfish wisdom, arid as the stone ;
He hath most knowledge who hath suffered most,
Perhaps most joy,—if all the truth were known.





CXXX.

A DREAM OF DEATH.

I.

I DREAMED a pleasant dream of death,
As a lady fair and bright,
Who came to my bedside suddenly
In the stillness of the night.
“Art thou afraid of me?” she said,
In tones so sweet and low,
That I knew she spoke as a kindly friend
And not as a vengeful foe.
And I answered cheerily, and sighed,
“No, my beloved, no!”

II.

“Why should I fear? thou canst not come
An hour before the day
Fixed and appointed; and thy steps
Nor hasten, nor delay.
I should have lived my life in vain,
Nor known where all things tend
If I’d not felt and surely known
That thou wouldst be my friend,

And that beginning were but loss
Unless for blessed end."

III.

Come to me then, O kindly Death !
This body fears thee not,
'Tis but the garment of the soul
To wear and be forgot.
I see thee stretch thy radiant hand
To open wide the door,
Through which my spirit, glad to pass,
Shall mount unseen, and soar
To learn the mysteries of Heaven
Ever and evermore.

IV.

To learn to know the hidden things
Too long by earth concealed,
The secrets of Eternity
That wait to be revealed.
Come to me, Death ! take off my robes
And lay them in the sod ;
I long to leave the doleful paths
Where, slave of Earth, I've trod,
And shine a naked soul in Heaven,
Immortal as my God !





MILTON IN THE PORCH.

(Milton in his old age, and after the publication of the "Paradise Lost," was scarcely known to his contemporaries. The popular poets of the day were "*the matchless Orinda*" (one Mrs. Arabella Philips) and "*the incomparable Cowley*." Where is their fame now? Or whose fame, except that of Shakspeare, surpasses Milton's?)

BLIND, old, and poor, the bosom-friend of Sorrow,
Threefold encompassed by malicious Fortune,
I sit alone beneath th' o'er-arching roses

That shade my cottage porch,—to breathe the odours
That load the breezes of the summer morning,
And catch the earliest sunshine on my forehead.

And as I sit, I hear the great world's echoes
Come floating like the blare of distant trumpets
Sounding the names that men hold most in honour :

Names of the prosperous, the rich, the mighty,
Names of successful knaves and winning gamesters,
Names of buffoons who tickle fools to laughter :

Names of the silly bards who rhyme for pastime,
But have no strength to utter thoughts for thinkers,
Or tell the Time one truth that's worth the knowing.

And then I sigh, with lingering human weakness,
That I, who once, like lark to Heaven upsoaring,
Flooded the fields with music and rejoicing,

Find listeners no more, that smaller voices,
Attuned to pettier themes, find larger audience,
And that great thoughts offend a little people ;—

Bards of the hour, that pile the ready guineas,
And say, “The age is ours, we teach it wisdom,
And wisdom is rewarded of its scholars.”

While I, alas ! must fight with fordid sorrow,
Slave of the poverty that holds me captive,
And binds me to its mud-bespattered chariot.

Yet tell me, O my conscience ! O my spirit !
And thou, my secret heart ! have I not striven,
Through long, brave years of effort and endurance,

To use my gifts of song to noblest purpose,
To cheer the sad, to comfort the afflicted,
And from the good to prophecy the better ?

Have I not ? Wherefore ask ? God knows His children,
To-day is not to-morrow ; and to-morrow
Hath its own creed, and utters its own judgments.

Hush, Disappointment ! raise thy head, meek Patience !
Why should I rail at what hard Fortune brings me
When I have that within which masters Fortune ?

Though beggared, yet a king ! mine is the Future,
My words and thoughts are shrined in Time’s safe keeping,
And if they’re worthy, they shall be immortal.



CXXXII.

A DREAM OF MY POEMS.

I.

'TWAS in the starry midnight,
The wind was whirling low,
And the tall pine-trees replying,
As it rocked them to and fro,
When half awake, half sleeping,
I thought that I was dead,
And floated to the gates of Heaven,
With angels at my head.

II.

Angels ; ah, well I knew them !
Pleasant and fair and kind ;
Things of my own creation,
And children of my mind.
I looked upon their faces,
And on their sunny wings,
Their eyes as bright as Summer,
Their breath like balm of springs.

III.

And some of them were finiling
Like innocence when glad ;
And some were grave and pensive,
With tearful eyes and sad.
But all of them were lovely ;
They were no more than seven ;
And they floated me and wafted me,
And carried me to Heaven.

IV.

“ And are ye *all* ? ” I whispered,
Betwixt a smile and tear,
“ Out of a thousand, only seven,
To make my light appear ?
Out of a thousand, only seven,
To shine about my name,
And give me what I died for,
The heritage of fame ? ”

V.

“ Hush ! ” said a stately angel,
Responsive to my thought,
“ We’re all the future Time shall know
Of what your hand hath wrought ;
Your gay green leaves, and flowers of song,
You’ve flung them forth broadcast ;
But like the bloom of parted years,
They’ve gone into the past.

VI.

“ But we, though no one knows us,
Shall echo back your tones
As long as England's speech shall make
The circuit of the zones.
Think not your fate unhappy !
To live to future time,
In noble thoughts and noble words,
Is destiny sublime.”

VII.

“ Angels of grace and beauty ! ”
I rubbed mine eyes and sighed,
“ A dream ! a dream ! a pleasant dream !
Of vanity and pride.
A sleeping thought ! a waking doubt !
If only *one* remain,
To cheer and elevate my kind,
I have not lived in vain.”

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